



EXCURSUS ON JONATHAN BELLER'S WORLD COMPUTER

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Exzerpt from the book "In the Delirium of the Simulation. Baudrillard Revisted" :
<https://non.copyriot.com/in-the-delirium-of-the-simulation-baudrillard-revisited-by-achim-szepanski/>

At important points in his study, Beller turns to the transformation of Marx's reproduction cycles. The movement from image to code and back to a transformed image (image-code-image'), which equals information (I), replaces the "C" for Beller, which in Marx's general formula of capital still stood for the classical commodity. Beller's paraphrase of Marx's famous capital formula M-C-M' leads to a new general formula for capital: M-I-M'. Beller then goes on to write the general formula as M-I-C-I'-M'. M stands for money, C for the code and I for image/information (ibid.: 139 ff.). The code here does not stand for a stable unit, but is to be understood as an algorithm (Miyazaki) or as a discrete moment in the movements of the discrete states of a computer – we could say all networked computers and the world computer. If we replace Marx's commodity "C" with I-C-I', we register the sublimation of the commodity form by the matrix of information. In the formula M-I-C-I'-M', the expanded notation I-C-I' also represents the integrated digital-productive activity. The image/information code of the network commodity replaces what used to be the classic commodity. With an extension and Marxification of Flusser's concept of the universe of technical images, Beller shows that in digital culture 2.0, commodity production is mediated in particular by images, meaning that data visualisation is a transaction in the movement from

money to image code and back. It is a networked process of vectorial connections.

The number and type of intervals from M to M' have reached an exponential expansion. The complete rewiring of space-time and (a)semiotics, at all operational levels as a result of the concise style of protocols of a unified operating system combined with the infinite digits of A.I., dispels old-fashioned metaphysics (as well as the old world itself) by employing new methods of branching and incorporation through enumeration and the assignment of numbers to produce any quality. The computational mode of production has inscribed itself deeply into the world. The recursive loop of the image-code of computation is now integrated into the general procedure required to get from M to M'. The image as a data visualisation is both processed and edited—it is a construction site for modifying code. Although we should perhaps say that information has emerged from the image of the commodity, we can now say that the image has become an aspect of information (Ibid.: 123).

In reality, I-C-I' can entail many iterations and determinations; they are permanent changes initiated by attentional, cognitive, metabolic, or other types of inputs. If we hold these types of inputs for a moment, it seems that utilisation can occur anywhere in the circuit or network, anywhere that something circulates and processes between M-M' and the interval indicated earlier by the commodity "C". That is, at every moment along the circuit from monetised capital investment to monetised profit, a value-producing transaction is possible, every movement or change generates new data, and every new state is a potential interface with productive labour in the context of the monetisation of affect and attention. Access to the data can also be priced out. Automated "labour", i.e. labour that is only performed by computer machines (or even ordinary machines), is always also part of machine amortisation as a production cost factor, which for Beller,

however, is not a source of profit. Here Beller avoids the question of machine added value.

Today, production is usually spread across several locations and flows through thousands of software authors, tens of millions of historically devalued (mostly female, mostly Asian) hands and millions of screens, which in turn are operated by millions of operator-functionaries. In a nutshell, innovation is merely an arbitrage on labour costs per computer bit. In the movement from factory to social factory, commodities no longer need to be materialised in object form (the new “commodities” are now combinations of brands, images, franchises and other financialised informatic-semiotic vectors); they exist and are produced as integrated price assemblages. Some of what is bought (by us) and done with our screen work is in the use of the platforms themselves, and as the branded self and fractal celebrity demonstrate, the utility and logic on a given platform enter into a common bond and together compose the cultural logic of computation. The branded self, fractal celebrity and other platform affordances are part of the control exercised by ‘digitality as cultural logic’. The rest of our labour, beyond that for which we receive some consideration in social currency, is also sedimented as data. It is absorbed, collected, captured, scraped, accumulated—in short, stolen through the primitive accumulation of metadata—and then bundled and sold to investors, shareholders or advertisers, or confiscated by governments, police and intelligence agencies. Our modifications to the discrete state of global computing are either remunerated or gratuitously performed as dispersed life activity in “soft” social currency: Viability, know-how, amazingness, connections, likes, etc.

Beller no longer recognises a clear distinction between technical image and computer code and wants to show that the resulting complications are endemic to the history of computing machines and thought. The software is

ultimately inseparable from the media environment in which it functions and therefore has no rigid boundary or discrete essence. The instances of data visualisation and cybernetic computation are “moments” in the expansion of the universe of information. Friedrich Kittler, taking this logic of embedding to its extreme, has declared that there is no software, because everything ultimately reduces to voltage differences. More precisely, he claims that there would be no software if computer systems were not surrounded by an environment of everyday languages, i.e. computers, like other media, are always also metaphor machines. And so the formula Image-Code-Image’ (written as I-C-I’ in the formula M-I-C-I’-M’), like the commodity “C” before it in M-C-M’, is also a kind of hypostasis – a discrete moment in the instrumentalised flow of the world (Ibid.: 161). The variables I and C, which are always marked by further variables, are networked moments in the flow of information that are mediated by a quantum hypostasis, i.e. points of networked interfaces. These mediations, which can be abbreviated as M-I-, where “I” is information, can be carried out today either by machines or by humans by means of sensory, affective, attentional, cognitive or metabolic work, and they can always be networked. For Beller, the flow M-I-M’ can be captured by a discrete state machine and at the same time represents the most concise and general form of networked production and reproduction of computational capital.

The screen image can therefore not be separated from the computer code that programs and stages it. The Mona Lisa, either in the Louvre or on the screen, is no longer just a painting, but rather a node and an interface in a huge information network. The environment of everyday language that “surrounds” the software is part of the software. This colonisation of text and image indicates the transformation of “human” interests into M’. For Beller, this is the real subsumption.

Jonathan Beller's comment on the chapter: "Received! That chapter you wrote on/with me in the Baudrillard book is the bomb. Best response in my life. Thanks."

You can order the book here: <https://shop.becoming.press/products/in-the-delirium-of-the-simulation-baudrillard-revisited-by-achim-szepanski>

or here: <https://forceincmilleplateaux.bandcamp.com/merch/in-the-delirium-of-the-simulation-baudrillard-revisited-by-achim-szepanski>

Lecture: <https://synnika.space/events/lesung-kapitalismus-im-delirium-von-spekulation-simulation-und-katastrophe>

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